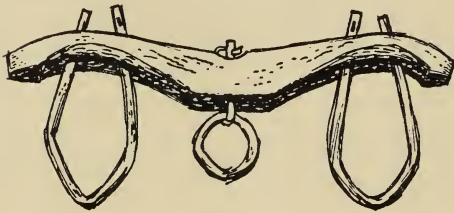

LINCOLN REMEMBERS




EDNA DAVIS ROMIG

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LINCOLN REMEMBERS

Edna Davis Romig

LINCOLN REMEMBERS

BY

EDNA DAVIS ROMIG



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Lincoln Room

*To my
Father and Mother*

Dedicatory

Great brooding spirit of my country's pride,
Grown so gigantic by a soul remote,
Uncomprehended—with no wish to hide
From any man, but with a secret note
So close the mighty mysteries, so near
The very throne of God, so good, so high
And yet so simple—Lincoln, martyr, seer,
Your name will live till right and freedom die.

A country in its youth has power to give
Its own peculiar genius. Homer is
But young, young Greece. Could Dante,
Shakespeare, live
Content with Einstein's laws? Our honor this:
We give—not wealth, not engines sleek and
swift—
Lincoln, the man, America's proud gift!

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April 25, 1861

Why don't they come—the men that I have
called?

Have I so early failed in this great task?

Have I misread the times? Are they appalled

Now that a fighting army has been asked?

Surely by now the call has gone about;

There is a hostile crowd, murmurs of doubt.

I fear this wait. If I could count on some

Staunch, loyal leader. . . . Oh, why don't they
come?

Yet it is given man somehow to know—

Though lost, in doubt, forlorn, by friends for-
saken—

That he will once again be strengthened so

To look on tempests and be never shaken. . . .

Sufficient for the day, it has been said,

Will be our food of strength, and beauty's bread.

For naked beauty lies within our cause :
To keep unmarred the land that Washington
Wrought, soul and sword, to give by freedom's
laws

A birth and sacred heritage; made one
From many by the blood and heart and mind
Of our forefathers pledged to Liberty.

Nowhere in the whole history of mankind
Has been so vast a plan to make men free.

They come—the soldiers march along our street,
The men and women shout; they laugh and
weep;

The soldiers come singing a droll new song,
“We’re coming, Father Abr’am, a hundred
thousand strong.”

The war has started; now we must go on.
And in the months to come—God’s will be
done!

The stars shine clear tonight, the moon is new;
How sweet that music from some far church
bell. . . .

And lilacs bloom somewhere—I know the smell.
Once near the Sangamon the lilacs grew;
I always liked them best when touched by dew;
A misty purple bush stood by the well. . . .
We used to count the shooting stars that fell. . . .
I always thought her eyes a pretty blue. . . .

Strange what she saw in me, a gawky lad,
A gawkier never walked New Salem roads;
But strange what future can befall a man
To give him breathless joy . . . to make him
sad. . . .

Queer how those Mississippi flatboat loads
Were driven down the Sangamon to Ann!

Ann! when she died I thought my life had died.
In that far youth I little knew the length
To which our hopes may go and yet be tried
By dark despair. I little knew the strength
Of human soul to bear the lash, the bars
Of anguish, and soul-devastating pain
Which time can heal—and scarcely show the
scars.

For joy comes back in God's good time again.
Joy can come back—if not the same delight,
Still often joy of richer, deeper kind.
We carry dreams of what we once designed;
But come at length to know that all is right.
Ann Rutledge gave me much, but Mary Todd
Has seemed to my dark years a lamp from God.

How dark have been the years, how dark the
years!

It seems my country has had grief enough
The world for centuries will need no tears.
Man's wisdom—ah, how frail. . . . We are such
stuff

As dreams are made on, and our little life
Is rounded with a sleep. . . . I fear to think
How much man bungles things for all his strife.
His little suns flare feebly, soon they sink. . . .

Now that reminds me of Josiah Small:
No matter how much rain the drought would
get us all!

Life cannot be so futile and so bad
As long as it holds Mary and young Tad. . . .
Yes, lilacs bloom somewhere, I know the smell.
How calm upon the spirit comes that bell.

Could fairy fernseed make great feet like mine
Invisible, then I should walk in ways
Quite secret and in silence, with a sign,
Through all our camps. . . . The elves and fays
Had many gifts in days of auld lang syne
That we in all the murk of later days
Would look upon, I reckon, as right fine.
Now fernseed in the shoes might teach me how
To move more featly with my Cabinet.
It's fairly clear to anybody how,
Invisible, I'd cause them less of fret!
This is my job. I'll do the best I can.
But fairy fernseed still might help a man.

February 22, 1862

Patience I try to have, but now and then
I find this virtue chafes. I can forget
The enterprising spirit of some men;
Still when it comes too thick I rather fret.
I hope they got the point, those men today—
“Now, gentlemen, suppose all that you own
Were gold you gave to Blondin to convey
Over Niagara on a rope so tightly thrown
He must walk very sure, would you then shout,
'Lean north, Blondin, or south; lean so and so;
Oh, Blondin, straighten up, turn more about'?
No. You would hold your breath and let him
go.

This Government is Blondin on that rope:
Keep silent, help him with your faith and hope.”

A tavern is a place to tarry in.
For at a tavern men speak out right free
And spin long yarns, not always free from sin,
But true to life as yarns dare ever be.
Good talk goes on of lands across the sea
And what men do and want and dare and think,
Good talk of crops and stock, of policy
Of man and state—of things not yet in ink.
Good old salt tales, and stories close to earth,
And now and then a venture into rhyme.
A story holds the whole of wisdom, mirth
When told just right at candle-lighting time.
It's stories still that makes the wide world kin—
A tavern is a place to tarry in.

What some folks need is one stout suit of jeans,
A piece of good homespun, cut on the square,
Honest and common stuff for wear and tear—
Their broadcloth minds begin to show the
seams.

I recollect the country ways, I guess,
More than my Cabinet can well allow;
Still a bit of Clary Grove for Congress now
Might do a lot to simplify the mess.
And take us all in all, we're not a crowd
To boast of—Oh, why should the spirit of mor-
tal be proud?

A yarn or two is not a deadly sin.
Many a grief is hidden by a grin.
And the Almighty will not grudge a man
His little solace—get it where he can.

Mysterious and unmeasured we hold those
Who keep aloof when purpose must be struck,
Who seek their own good counsel, have the
 pluck
To face a problem squarely, who can close
The gates of doubt when doubts are subtle foes.
Too much advice may cumber and obstruct;
He who keeps silence better may instruct;
And wise is he who his resources knows.
Yet why his reticence should be esteemed
As unsolved greatness or a mystery
I do not know. Whoever long has dreamed,
Has read his fellowman in history,
Has striven for a faith or principle,
Builds of himself a fort invincible.

December 16, 1862

Shiloh, Antietam, Fredericksburg, Bull Run—
They taste like wormwood; Socrates might
drink

Another cup of hemlock and be done
With sorrows now which make the old ones
shrink

To little ills. We lose our men, have won
No victory. We now seem on the brink
Of dark disaster—what was well begun
Falls into failure, and I fear to think. . . .

Alone, alone man must be in his grief.
Lonely I think most men are doomed to be.
Insight and understanding bring relief
But in life's darkest moments who can see?
Great God of battles and of human woe,
Forsake us not—help us to see, to go!

Christmas, 1862

The Yule log burns no more upon the hearth;
Our Christmas candles gleam, but with a light
More like the tapers of a death, a birth,
Than with the merry blaze of Christmas night;
There is a solemn hush, a heavy dearth
Even of holy bells. If eyes are bright
It is with unshed tears, not joy or mirth—
New graves lie hidden where new snow lies
white.

A country torn by war, a fatherland
Sundered and suffering, in grief, despair—
These are the gifts of war. How far away
The clear-voiced carollers, friends hand in hand,
Holly and incense and the happy prayer
Of an exultant, joyous Christmas Day.

The day had faded out in ashen chill
And desolation filled my heart once more—
As one who stands upon some silent shore
I gazed at the illimitable until
Eternity beat there upon the hill
Like starless waters with a sullen roar
Engulfing me in gloom I never knew before,
A while gave threat and then grew strangely
still.

But with the stillness gradually grew peace
And from the nameless dark I turned my face
Toward the skies . . . a benediction sent
Like human touch gave infinite release:
My spirit rose serene—a holy place
Had grown this hill beneath God's firmament.

Sometimes we find ourselves in that same guise
So richly told of Shakespeare's Bernardine,
"Your friends, the hangman, sir, good sirs, arise,
Rise and be hanged." It is a comely scene
In which the prisoner rubs his sleepy eyes
And swears he will not die although he seem
Ungracious; he is far too shrewd and wise
To go in haste, and sleepy—that wise Bernar-
dine.

Our friends, the hangman, seem also to call,
A naive, friendly call to come and die.
We have fine counsel from both field and hall,
From friend and foe and from the low and high.
If plentiful advice could save the day
All present problems would be swept away.

Heart of a hundred hungers, do not grieve.
Nay, do not sorrow the forever lost.
You will be solaced though you now believe
Joy never can be purchased. Any cost
Is not too great to gain once more surcease
From pain too long remembered. Now be fed
By life's more vital food. Taste not the bread
Of loneliness spread sweet with memories.
The emptiness of barren dreams, the long
Slow waiting for a vain, a vain tomorrow
Are futile. Strength alone can vanquish sorrow,
And only strength can give to you a song.
You will be solaced, ah, believe, believe—
Heart of a hundred hungers, do not grieve.

America has been a splendid tale :
A vast new continent, found by a whim
Of fate (or Providence) with traces dim
Of far romantic visitors, a trail
From Spain and France; and many an English
 sail
And little Holland vessels, clean and trim;
Pirates with knives, the Pilgrim with his
 hymn—
Many the men that rode the Atlantic gale.

Her swinging shores, her hills, her forests deep
Have staged a drama singularly tense,
Of settlement, of war, and westward sweep
Across frontiers, a commonwealth immense—
A land where all her people may be free;
America, sweet land of Liberty!

The old flint heads we found along the bluffs,
Slate-gray or red, smooth, sharp, and pointed
true—

A trace as sure as skin the rattler sloughs—
Told of a chapter grim our fathers knew:
The war-whoop in the night, winged shafts that
flew

At cabin doors from lurking hidden forms
Along the clearing's edge; savage halloo—
Most dreaded of the frontier's dread alarms.
Malign were many forces—sickness, storms—
But these bronzed, slinking figures in war paint
Made strong men tremble as they caught up
arms,

Made children cower, and brave women faint,
Most fearful of the terrors that they knew,
That froze the blood and brought the cold sweat
through.

War paint and beads and feathers and the high
Fantastic leaping of the lithe red man
Around a crimson fire, the savage cry
Barbaric in its quavering rise, and then
The deadly sweep of arrows, yells again
And dance about the fire. The beasts of prey
Knew more of mercy than the Indian
Who gloated in the sight of him he'd slay.
A cunning peace would shroud the scene next
 day
And only ashes show where cabins stood
Unless some scalpless child in silence lay,
Or scalpless man along the quiet wood.
So grim have been the trails across our land
It would be treachery to yield the land. . . .

The water dipper hangs beside the well;
From cool dark depths still lifts the old pole
 sweep
A brimming bucket of cold water, sweet
As age-old wine the honest vintners sell,
And thrice times more refreshing; then it creaks
As weighted end goes up and bucket drops
Past moss-grown rocks and fern; a fat frog hops
Down to a lower ledge and challenge speaks;
The bucket sinks, the pole sweep lifts past ferns
And grass-grown crevice, many a mossy stone;
The old gourd dipper serves its many turns
And then is left once more to hang alone.
Such scenes of childhood limn themselves so
 clear
We marvel at the commonplace grown dear.

I heard an old white woman in Kentucky—
Whose curious proverbs many books would
fill—

Say that a man-child never could be lucky
Across whose cradle called the whippoorwill.
But if he nibbled sassafras at noon,
Cut clean and smoothed of leaves in the new
moon,

And spoke no word for thirty minutes after
He would be given, too, the gift of laughter.
She said that fairy silk from milkweed pods
And fireflies in a bottle for a candle
Would make that boy have power enough to
handle

Wild creatures and to see fine gold in clods.
The whippoorwill once called across my
cradle.

The old wife's tale was not entirely fable.

The folks that have been friends are dear to me,
All those good people of the long ago—
My mother most of all; to her I owe
All that I am or ever hope to be.

Jack Armstrong, Mentor Graham I still see
As in New Salem days; and Bowling Green
And his wife Nancy, who indeed have been
The wealth of friendship in their poverty.
And brave Jack Kelso, generous friend indeed
With Burns and Shakespeare—loaded with his
lore

He showed a lonely lad a magic door.
And deep and sure the friendship of young
Speed.

There comes a time when only friendship can
Afford a solace to the heart of man.

To kill the goose that lays the golden egg
Is not the way of wisdom; or to wring
The mute throat of the lark to make it sing;
If we would bargain well, we do not beg.
And if we would keep counsel of a friend
We do not try forthwith to make a foe—
Now why should I these tried men overthrow
Because they question me? Why make an end
To years of seasoned service and insight
Into affairs that long from me may hide?
The time is dark. I need each ray of light.
What's all this foolish talk of foolish pride?
I need Seward and Chase—and every man
Who has the mind to help: he must and can!

The force and circumstance that shape our ends
Must move at last into some vaster plan
Than we conceive. Our homes, our work, our
 friends
Fall into ken; without the will of man,
Or but half-willed, events take shape, and form
Kaleidoscopic patterns of our days;
We aim at this high thing, but the real norm
Is set by chance or destiny in ways
Ungessed. I like to think it is by goals
That we are judged, not the material gain
So often futile—little feeble rôles
In the nobler drama that we would attain.
Like the radiant dawn are the far things we
 seek,
Or flame of sunset on some mountain peak.

The strategy of war so far has been
A fast closed book, a country unexplored ;
The warfare of the world, without, within,
Has been a thing of bows, the lance, the sword,
Of missiles met, projectiles deadly sent
For vanquishing and conquering a foe ;
A list of dates and places, armament,
And generals, of powers that come and go.
Now I must study military skill,
The science of a move and countermove,
The art by which effectually we kill,
The tactics which strategically must prove
The best ones to inflict untold distress :
I must now master war's grim game of chess.

Would it were given me as to the Quaker
To have the spirit move with certainty—
A promise to myself and to my Maker
Solemnly I have pledged—to proclaim free
The slaves of these United States, a measure
Both for the Union and for Liberty.
I know that such a stroke is not the pleasure
Of all. Another means I cannot see.
With new occasions must rise new solutions,
The dogmas of the quiet past avail
No whit for the stormy present. Revolutions
Must bring new methods or completely fail.
If this be wise, the world will yet applaud;
If just and right it will be blessed by God.

This nation can't exist half slave, half free;
If I could save the Union by a stroke
To free all slaves, to that I should agree,
Or free a few, or keep all in the yoke:
The Union must be saved. No state has right
To break away; they only came to be
Free states by being through the Union free
And to preserve that Union it has might.
America has caught a vision high,
Of equal chance for all, a vast experiment.
The people's candid voice—Democracy.
And if the effort fails, great faiths will die;
We must preserve the people's government,
America's proud page of Liberty.

An ordered world of justice and of right,
The lash no longer on black, flinching flesh,
Where man will man—by law—no longer
 smite;
A freer world where man may look afresh
On constitutions of equality;
No longer woman fingered on the block
As slavers chaffer in frivolity
And value human flesh in terms of stock.
Why need the white race make the black race
 plod
In cruel ways? All ways are cruelly rough;
The races of the earth have toil enough
To shape themselves in image of their God.
This traffic still must make Satanic mirth
Till it be banished quite from off the earth.

January 1, 1863

The time has come. The pen is in the ink.
The parchment of the Proclamation lies
Beneath my hand. Need slavery extinct
In our free land cause curious surmise?
Why need I pause? Why rest my arm so long?
If now my hand should tremble they would say
I had compunction—I who hold so strong
The faith that slavery has had its day.
They shall be free, the slaves, forever free—
But still the Southern holders have their right;
My vision, short and poor, can yet foresee
Some of the bitter consequence of what I write.
Yet I shall take the censure and the hate. . . .
No longer bond the black; the slave emancipate.

July, 1863

The fatal rhythm as of marching feet
Sounds hour by hour, forever, in my ear,
The solemn tramp, tramp, tramp all night I
hear,
The day is filled with echoes of the beat,
A sadly valiant spirit in the beat—
Young courage conquering dark hidden fear,
Old wisdom learning valor—grim, austere. . . .
The fatal rhythm of the marching feet.
The boys in blue, the boys in gray move on,
The stars and stripes, the stars and bars, un-
furled
But all those marching ones like stones are
hurled
Against each other—so are battles won.
Still must the rhythm beat, early and late:
The Union will be kept inviolate.

April, 1864

Now General Grant intends to move on Lee,
And Meade is on the Rapidan. In May
The campaign of the Wilderness will be
Pushed out from Culpeper—a fearful way
Through maze of scrub-oak, pine, and chinka-
pins,
A labyrinth of hazel brush and vine
And tangled thorns. And either side that wins
Must lose, for blood will flow like wine. . . .
Ah, desolate these days. Was it for this
That I debated Douglas? That I yearned
Those nights before the cabin fire, with gleams
Of radiant vision? Felt the fervent kiss
Of Mary Todd? For this I mutely burned
With pity in slave markets of Orleans?

“Man’s inhumanity to man,” he sang
Who knew, “makes countless thousands mourn!”
Oh, Bobby Burns, your clear voice rang
Through all my youth and now that griefs and
scorn

Fall fast, your Scottish songs come all the more
To hours that need the lilt and light and fun
That fell like balm upon the hurt and sore
Of your own days, and will till mine are done.
The little ills that fret the human heart—
The disappointments, disillusionments,
Humiliations, and the sting and smart
Of broken dreams, the straining impotence—
These are the burdens that unnerve the strong,
While of your sorrows you could weave a song.

I used to watch the morning-glory vine
Bloom on the palings or the low porch rail—
The colored trumpets glowed in bright sun-
shine;

I liked the way the blossoms seemed to sail,
A gay-hued fleet upon the morning wind,
And all the fluttering leaves the rolling seas.
Here came the bees and butterflies to find
New nectar. From the honey-locust trees
Drifted a subtle perfume. Rustling wings
Moved swift among the pointed maple
leaves. . . .

Life seemed to surge through all those early
springs—

A mockery if only mortal grieves:
Yet now, as then, I feel when spring days start
A something sought for by the human heart.

“Rail-splitter,” yes and “Honest Abe” and more
Such names I grew to take a pride in. Now
They seem like ghostly honors. Folks have store
Of names more polished, soubriquets somehow
Not quite so rugged or so proudly worn.
Range and variety I must allow
Mark all these vials of wrath and cups of scorn
Poured now upon the Presidential brow.
But as I walk where trees are glistening white,
When skies show clean and still and far and
 high,
When peace is sweet upon the silent night,
And slim Orion strides the western sky,
I listen for a gentle voice, “My son,
Walk prayerfully: your work will be well
 done.”

July 12, 1864

I reckon Early's men are right smart men—
Their bullets come so straight. Fort Stevens
stands

In need of more than parapets to stem
This flood of iron. Only this fort commands
Defense of Washington. How close they come,
The Southern forces, to the Union heart.
How much they count their cause. They must
succumb.

No thing must keep the North and South apart.
O Power that guided through my boyhood
years,

Gave strength to will, strengthened the arm that
swung

The woodsman's ax, that drove the flat-boat pole,
That gave the gift of laughter, and of tears,
Tempered the spirit, disciplined the tongue—
Omnipotent, keep Thou this nation whole!

Too much stock we put in things, I calculate.
Now take for instance all this deep surprise
At poor Abe's youth, "impoverished, desolate"—

Some pretty pinching times, no one denies,
But frontier cabins can't be what you'd call
A place of luxury and broad, warm ease:
We did forego the festal board and hall,
We split the rails, we felled the forest trees,
We turned the soil with clumsy, home-made
ploughs,
We butchered hogs, and milled our wheat and
corn,
We made our beds and chairs of hickory boughs,
We were the midwives when a child was born.
But something went with all that want and
toil—
A something Bobby Burns found on Scotch
soil.

We piled the pelts and new-tanned skins, and
stacks
Of ginseng and of yellow-root, and bark
Of sassafras and slippery ellum; sacks
Of corn—nubbins or full-grained ears with
mark
To show their seed-corn rank; and kegs of malt;
Bags of potatoes; pokes of hickory nuts;
And now and then a block of cow-lick salt—
Bound fast with thong and withe against the
ruts,
These treasures from our traps and hoes, from
woods
And field and stream, we would pile high
In the old wagon-bed of poles and planks,
Load up the rick of all our country goods,
Back to the tongue the oxen standing by,
Drop yoke, and swing the whip along their
flanks.

So would we start for town two times a year,
Our long-gleaned wealth secure : the wheels new
rimmed,
The poles new lashed ; and strengthened all the
gear—
Axle and brake and pins ; the oxen trimmed
And curried like a horse, their heavy yoke
Whittled to polished curves on winter nights ;
Wheel-spokes and hubs new set after their soak
In tubs or in the creek ; lanterns for lights,
With treasured oil and chimney lights a-shine,
For broken glass was tragic in those days
And smoky glass a shame. If the task were mine
To drive the load to town, I lived in haze—
So splendid the adventure and so high :
We brought back home the things we flourished
by.

This autumn morning holds delicious tang
Of autumn woods from very long ago,
Where shy squirrels gathered nuts, the thrushes
sang.

I see high in a tree persimmons glow
A pungent orange, the beechnuts shattered out
In brown triangles, chestnuts burst from burrs
And plump and glossy lie scattered about
Among bruised walnut hulls. Boy foragers
Knew where the hazel brush grew thick, and
where

Were gold and mellow pawpaws under leaves.
Rare fruitage stored in pockets, hats, and sleeves
Came with the hint of wood-smoke in the air.
Ah, wealth was there that never has been spent—
How calm is childhood and how deep content.

Wild crab and haw and redbud, violets
And fern and deerstongue and the dogwood
boughs—

These loved in childhood years no one forgets.
The smell of soil new turned by pensive ploughs,
Blueberry clumps sought out some pail to fill,
Rare mountain laurel and the pink wild rose,
The tang of wintergreen on some high hill—
These are the gold at the end of youth's rain-
bows.

Now in the years of problems and of noise,
In the fierce struggle of the crucial hour,
Perplexities and griefs, there never fails
A sure relief—a strength, and somber joys.
It's strange that man keeps silent beauty's power
But gathers mirth by telling funny tales!

Today I saw a mother worn with grief,
Broken with sorrow, tired, and all a-thirst
For some cool drink of comfort. I'd as lief
My own life had been scourged. It was her first
Real desolation. . . . I remembered our
Own loss, so poignant that we cannot speak
Of Willie's death. I prayed for some new
power
To speak her peace; but I was dumb and weak.

The cool dim twilight of some forest hour,
The glimmering sun on some still woodland
creek,
The gallant growing of some wayside flower—
There is in these some balm that we may seek.
Sometimes we find our consolations are
Those secret forces from a tree, a star.

December 22, 1864

In Georgia, Sherman's men march to the sea,
For Chattanooga and Atlanta have been taken.
Today a quaint, terse message comes to me,
A message, I confess, that leaves me shaken—
"I present as Christmas gift this southern city
Together with two hundred heavy cannon
And ammunition, countless bales of cotton,
And the swift and full retreat of General
Hardee."

Those Southern firesides must be cold tonight,
The tables bare, the hallways dark and chill,
The Christmas tapers will not bloom to light,
The Christmas bells cannot ring out good-will.
O God, when will this bitter warfare cease!
How long, how long must we yet wait for peace?

Christmas, 1864

Shepherds, a star, a stable, and a song—
So simple were the signs when Christ was born :
A weary woman, travel-tired and worn,
Mary the Mother in the hurried throng
For Cæsar's taxes ; they had hunted long
To find them shelter till another morn.
The inn was full. But where the fragrant corn
Was laid for oxen was a bed, clean, strong.
And so the Christ-Child came to Bethlehem ;
To David's little town the Wise Men came,
And shepherds knelt in honor to His name
While angel voices sang good-will to men. . . .
So simply did our Christmastide begin—
A holy manger near a crowded inn.

In Illinois the old men tell the tale
Of Johnny Appleseed and his queer ways
Through plains and forests of his westward trail
That often filled the folk with deep amaze.
Clothed in a sack, with tin-pan for a hat,
With food or not, but always with his seeds,
He scattered in the woods, on hill and flat,
The trees that were to grow towards men's needs.
For long before the westward pioneer
He walked barefoot, lover of birds and bees,
A friend of Indians. A wild frontier
He charted by his herbs and apple trees;
And so the orchards of the West began.
Strange in what forms a dream may haunt a
man!

And I remember harvest fields all ripe
In golden grain, and the long silver scythe
Flashing in curving swathes that seemed to wipe
A band of bronze across the fields. And blithe
The reaper whistled, while the meadow-lark
From the cool cover of the ribboned corn
Sent back the note like some far-echoing horn.
And fragrant sheaves stood there when it was
dark.

Life's harvest fields are golden and the storms
Threaten the yield: the winds of hate may come
To buffet down the heavy heads of grain;
Into the fields may come dark, swinish forms
To trample and devour; and there may come
The swift destruction of the hail and rain.

Blue violets grew by the Rutledge mill,
Bright yellow blooms spread on the old rail
fence,
The redwood grew on our Kentucky hill,
A hundred flowers, a hundred different scents.
And here are flowers—orange, crimson, blue,
Bursting on hill, springing in wood and field,
Creeping along the rivers, every hue—
The flowers of inferno battles yield.
Must cannon belch and guns forever spew,
The muskets roar, must sabers always flash,
Must ax demolish what it once did hew,
And morning winds be lost forever in the crash
Of new-born battle? No. The day will dawn
When all these ghastly blossoms shall be gone!

The destiny that rules the lives of men,
That ploughs the soil and reaps the harvests
 sown,
Has brought us to wide battlefields again—
The greatest conflict that the world has known :
A war with strange new craft and bigger guns,
With larger armies, longer lists of dead,
With new explosives and more deadly bombs,
With broader battle lines where men have bled.
But if another war sweep on the world,
The battle lines will draw across the race.
New banners of new death will be unfurled
So far into far lands we cannot trace.
If war-torn ages could to that age speak
Peace would be all that any man would seek.

We seek to find the origin, the springs
Of action—where and how and when and why?
We must resolve the ultimate of things
To rule precise, exact, to measure by.
The mind of man is more than this and that
Propounded by the books; still will elude
Some strange essential cause and thus combat
The futile premise of what we conclude.

I know if I could walk where mountains are,
Where solemn beauty broods and solitude
Becomes majestic, where a peak, a star,
Becomes the symbol of man's fortitude,
That mystic, incommunicable power
Would give me wisdom for this crucial hour.

The sun sent through a piece of convex glass
Will kindle flames of some stupendous fire;
And dropping water wear away at last
The strongest stone. Sometimes a silent lyre
Will feel the phantom fingers of the wind.
A force of will, a firm and steady flow
Of purpose, and a calm and constant glow
Will form and slow transfuse the human mind.
I will be steadfast in my inner hope
That I shall be the channel of some force;
I will not waver though I needs must grope
To keep me certain, steady in the course;
Staunch, resolute, and sure the spirit till
I am the tool of One outside my will.

March 4, 1865

We cannot realize "Thy will be done"
Nor purposes of the Almighty know;
It must needs be that grave offenses come
And through offenses must the world have woe.
It may be now our God decreed in might
That blood drawn with the lash must yet be paid
By blood drawn with the sword. Still will be
said

The judgments of the Lord are true and right.
If God wills war till all the wealth piled up
By the bondsman's unrequited toil be sunk,
Then we must drink still of the bitter cup
From which in agony we long have drunk.
But fondly we hope and fervently do pray
This mighty scourge of war may pass away.

“Heaven doth with us as we with torches do,
Not light them for ourselves.” This is the sole
Grave problem. If for ourselves we rue
Our action, that is small; but for the whole
Wide nation if we err, irreparable
May be the wrong. Within our lives
A power—too oft denied, irrevocable—
To light and surely guide us still survives.
If we from all this darkness find release
We need that guiding power, its clarity,
Now to achieve a just and lasting peace.
With malice toward none, with charity
For all, humbly, with firmness in the right
We act—as God gives us to see the right.

To bind the nation's wounds, to care for him
Who shall have borne the battle, for his wife
And children; in the darkness try to trim
The lamp to light toward a strange new life
Four million human souls so sudden freed
From bondage that their freedom will involve
A million dangers. There is urgent need
One of history's vast enigmas now to solve.
The Power that has guided erring feet,
Informed the groping mind, and touched the
 eyes
To sight, will yet his great design complete—
Will guide us now, will help us to be wise.
Soon peace will come; it cannot long delay.
Unutterable grief shall pass away.

It was in sorrow that I walked today
The streets of Richmond, with the people gone
Or silent in their grief. Soldiers in gray
On leave for wounds—so many hunger-wan
They seemed like ghosts—limped by or grimly
sat

By black-draped doors. It was a walk to make
A heart of stone know pain. No wonder that
My soul is sore. I think my throat will ache
Until I die with what I saw today. . . .
Yet many a one I met who is a friend,
A friend in Northern blue, in Southern gray,
Glad that at last we see the long war end. . . .
It will be years before we fully are
Restored to health—and then will be a scar.

I think beneath the turmoil of the times
When I have caught the full significance
Of battle-front, maneuver, and the lines
In action, more than any circumstance
I have perceived the splendid generalship
Of the rebel leaders; military skill
Has marked each move—even the tragic slip
Reveals the master mind, a master will.
If they have lost, it is from lack of men,
And lack of food and arms, and it must be
A lack of right upon their side. But yet
When history writes the years of war and when
True worth emerges, General Robert Lee
Will stand a hero time will not forget.

We are too near to get perspective now,
But near and stricken as we are, we know
The almost holy faith, the sacred vow
The South has given: they've loved their leaders
so!

They've given their last wealth, their youngest
sons—

But still is martial music from their band,
They sing their songs and sound their clarions,
And march in ranks to death for Dixie Land!
Even beggared they will show a royalty
And to a cause defeated valiant cling—
Nor anarchy nor treason can we bring
In charge against such perfect loyalty.
And we may break their waning strength, and
we

May force to terms: we shall not vanquish Lee.

The peace has come, and Grant has nobly made
His terms: For General Lee will keep the sword
He has so nobly borne, his men the blade
Each one so bravely kept. Their flag is lowered
In silence more than shame. The horses go
Back to the lands to bear the soldiers home,
And there to till the soil, to reap, to sow,
And bring the southern fields back to their own.
From Appomattox now the thin lines turn
Toward the thresholds of far homes. And some
Will have no home or land. And some hearts
 yearn
For those who never can again come home. . . .
Ah, war is terrible—and battles won,
War still is terrible when it is done. . . .

April 9, 1865

They say that I must have a photograph
Now that the war is over, or about.
Well, then, I'll sit. The cabinet and staff
Will get into the papers—what a shout
Goes up within the land. The war is done.
But what great work remains few understand.
The grim, grim war is done, our goal is won;
Yet still there are dark days for the whole land.
Now close today seem all the early days,
The shanty in Kentucky—I was seven
When we moved west. The Indiana hills
Were pretty then, all lying in a haze.
Woods always seemed to me a sort of heaven. . . .
I'd like to know again the woods and hills.

Was ever boy left free in forest, field,
Along the wooded creeks or river bank
That solitary hours failed to yield
Some magic brew that eagerly he drank
And stored up strength for later barren days?
He may unconscious feel the prairie wind
Sweep from far miles where atmosphere is
 thinned
By altitudes unknown, or he may gaze
Careless and dreaming in some wood-fire blaze
Seeing vague visions, peering at phantoms
 dim—
And all these subtle powers moulding him
As sure as potter shapes his earthen clays.
Can we explain this puzzling chemistry,
Write cause-effect in human history?

April 14, 1865

And superstition—should we hold in scorn
Those irrepressible upsurgings from a past
Far distant, dim, surviving from the morn
Of man's long struggle, when he must forecast
And take precautions so to reconcile
The evil spirits; when he must depend
Upon some omen for a frown or smile
Of fate? Some destiny would sure forefend
Coming events, or warn. Now I have dreams
In which I half believe, although I jest:
I often ride a vague black boat which seems
To move in darkness on a wave's vague crest.
I dreamed that dream last night. Today I move
More strangely conscious of the ones I love.

The songs we cannot sing will sing themselves.
The songs that I love best are part of me:
Some are of far-off lands and knights and elves;
And those my sister sang—"Little Mohee,"
"Come in, little stranger," "The stars one and
all,"
"Say, darkie, hab you seen de massa?" So
Ran the tale of "de land of de Jubilo";
And childhood's game when London Bridge
must fall.
There were old hymns my mother sang at night;
There were new songs with many a flaming
word:
"The vintage where the grapes of wrath are
stored,"
Of a land where freedom rings, of God and
Right.
The words return, the cadence answering—
They sing themselves, the songs we cannot sing.

I shall go back to the broad plains again—
Prairies sweeping toward the setting sun,
The forelands of the nation with the stain
Of blood, the bones of scouts, the fearless gun
Of stockade and of fort, the valiant ring
Of woodsman's ax; to the hilltops where will
burn

The signal fires—wherever yet will cling
Frontier tradition, there I shall return.

The phantom ox-carts will forever go
On soundless wheels along the dim far trail
Of pioneer; across the sands, the snow,
The westward wagons move, in heat, in gale:
Across far fields where ranged the buffalo
The phantom ox-carts will forever go.

April 14, 1865

The thought within a thought, the outermost
Pavilions of the seven ranging stars,
The form behind the form of all the host
Impalpable and unconstrained by bars
I have long sought—for thrice times seven years
Thrice over—and have, seeking, never found.
The whirling worlds, the sure-revolving spheres
That course the universe like Heaven's hound
Have answered not; the laws of Euclid not;
The Hebrew seers have answered not; nor all
The piled up wisdom of man's age-long quest.
A hint is in all these, and in the wind,
The hills, the trees, in flowers, the rise and fall
Of tides, in man himself—but not half guessed.
The meaning of the meaning I must find.

April 14, 1865

“To be imprisoned in the voiceless winds
And blown with restless violence round about
The pendent world”—Death to our finite minds
Takes on strange forms: A candle quick snuffed
out.

“This sensible warm motion to become
A kneaded clod.” The dreaded unknown sum
Of unknown ills. “To go we know not where.”
To leave the warmth and light, the stars, the air.
“To lie in cold obstruction and to rot.”
“The undiscovered country from whose bourne
No traveler returns.” Man’s fate forlorn.

I have the faith beyond that secret door
Life’s meaning will be clear forevermore.

April 14, 1865

“After life’s fitful fever he sleeps well;
Treason has done his worst: nor steel nor poison.
Can touch him further!” Death’s quiet horizon
Now lies serene, as when sunbeams dispel
The wrack of summer clouds; or shades with-
drawn

Reveal the tranquil firelight of a room;
Or winter gone, the woodland full of bloom;
Or thick black night, the splendor of the dawn.

Just what that rest may be we cannot tell,
Whether we wake to work when nothing over-
whelms,
Whether the spirit sweeps to vast new realms—
“After life’s fitful fever he sleeps well”:
Life’s grief and error now he understands.
How infinite the healing of God’s hands.

April 14, 1865

The theater is strange tonight, the play
Seems not to interest me so much as lines
That I have read. Queer how Shakespeare
could say

A simple truth in words whose splendor shines
Down the dim ages. David's song can move
The mind of man to music. No one knows
How much of music I have found to love. . . .
How jerkily the front stage curtain rose.
The people seem relaxed—my people still:
We've gone through much together. Soon will
be

A greater peace. God in his wisdom will
Let us see clearly what we darkly see. . . .
Now through the dark there is a rift of light;
Who loves the stars is fearless of the night.





